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ABSTRACT

One of eight papers from Project Seed, this paper describes a conflict resolution program co-facilitated by a special educator and a guidance counselor and designed to help young students who have conflicts with authority figures in school and elsewhere, as well as those students with low self-esteem and poor social skills. The project described includes small group work with students, classroom lessons, teacher in-services, and parent education. Making Better Choices, a series of lessons developed by Walt Harris of the University of Maine, is used in the program along with basic principles of self-esteem and social problem solving. It is noted that the program requires a minimum financial investment and can be adapted for use in other schools. Program participants, goals, and anticipated outcomes are described. Procedures and instructions are presented in six steps: (1) partner facilitators review materials and schedule meeting times to prepare and plan lessons; (2) small groups of four to seven students are formed and begin to meet; (3) staff are trained in the use of Making Better Choices; (4) cooperative classroom lessons are implemented; (5) parents are included in the program; and (6) changes and adaptations in the program are considered. Resources needed to implement the program are discussed, and costs are considered both in terms of money and in terms of staff time. (NB)

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BREAKING GROUND: Carving New Forms for Resolving Conflict

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BREAKING GROUND:

Carving New Forms for Resolving Conflict

A Special Education-Guidance Partnership Project

Co-facilitated by a Special educator and a Guidance counselor, important elements of this partnership project include small group work, classroom lessons, teacher in-service and parent education. The male and female co-facilitators provide differing, but mutually-supportive models for young students who have conflicts with authority figures in school and elsewhere, as well as for those with low self-esteem and poor social skills.

Participants

Based on regular education counseling referrals and special education I.E.P's, small groups of 4-7 students at each grade level learn both the "Making Better Choices"* lessons by Walt Harris of the University of Maine, and basic principles of self-esteem/social problem-solving. Teachers receive training at staff in-services using the language of the MBC* program, and are given classroom posters of this language to use. Teachers and staff practice using the Stop-Plan-Do-Check process to assist students in resolving conflicts in the classroom, on the playground, and in the cafeteria. Parents of group members are encouraged to meet with a facilitator, and are given home charts of the MBC language and problem-

solving cycle. The co-facilitators present cooperative learning classroom lessons by which students school-wide learn the language of MBC. Students take home a simple handout for the family refrigerator, to guide parent and child through the MBC steps which interrupt and replace impulsive, ineffective behaviors.

Who might consider adapting this project

Special educators, guidance counselors or any partnerships might use all or parts of this project. Those looking for long-term change school-wide can invest in all facets and/or create their own.

Program Goals

BREAKING GROUND is a project which allows co-facilitators to create new methods of shared instruction and new visual materials to teach social skills, the interruption of impulsive behaviors, and steps for resolving internal and interpersonal conflicts. When students and their parents or teachers tell you stories about when they could have or did use "Making Better Choices"* language in a difficult situation, you know the project is worth every minute you have stolen from other demands to put into it!

Outcomes

BREAKING GROUND is a long-term investment in healthier school and home communities.

Procedures and Instructions

1. Partner facilitators begin to work together by reviewing the "Making Better Choices"* curriculum guide, making "Number Line", "Stop, etc.", and "Cycle of Feelings" posters which they will use daily. Partners schedule regular meeting time to prepare materials for dissemination, to plan lessons, and to discuss the needs of the project as it evolves in the small groups, school-wide and with parents.

2. Groups of 4-7 students join small groups based on teacher, parent or self-referrals and/or special education I.E.P.'s. Grade 2 groups meet twice weekly, while grades 3-6 groups meet weekly for the school year. Groups are heterogeneous, combining boys and girls with a range of ineffective behaviors, from withdrawn to acting-out.

A carefully-structured, consistent routine to small group meetings, including greeting and salutation practice with MBC language, has proven powerfully effective in focussing issues and social skills lessons.

Children maximize growth by learning how to talk about their own difficulties and offer help to others using a common language about feelings, plans and consequences.

3. Since consistent practice of the MBC language and conflict resolution steps is required, the entire staff is trained during staff meetings and during classroom lessons. The staff had received conflict resolution training prior to the introduction of the current project. MBC role-playing and posters for the classrooms give teachers confidence and motivation to practice with their students.

4. Cooperative classroom lessons, done by the facilitators, allow students school-wide to try out the steps that interrupt ineffective conflict behaviors. Puppets, role-plays and cooperative games enhance children's desire to try out new words and ways to relax and think through possible solutions. Teachers appreciate having facilitators continue assisting with regular classroom meetings in which MBC language is used to discuss classroom and playground issues.

5. P.E.T. meetings, catching parents at morning drop-offs and afternoon pick-ups, and inviting permission letters are all taken as opportunities to communicate with parents about key concepts of the MBC approach to resolving conflicts. Parents are happy to hear their

children use the language on the refrigerator posters.

6. Calling us about any facet of your adaptation would be welcome. We are still learning, adapting, creating new materials, and encouraging students, teachers, parents and ourselves that changing old behaviors into effective, mutually-satisfying interactions takes time - MAYBE YEARS - to learn !

Resources

The guidance office is needed for small group meetings. The "Making Better Choices" curriculum written by Walt Harris is required and may be purchased through the University of Maine for a cost of approximately $35.00. For an additional $45.00, various sizes of poster paper and markers will be needed. A laminator and small group activity materials (some cooperative games, drawing materials, clay, etc.) are all required.

Any outside resources, small group field trips, low elements ropes courses, etc. would be effective additions to the project, but not essential.

Anticipate 40-50 hours to mail communications to parents and teachers, to make materials and for weekly planning time.

Conclusion

Students in small groups look forward to the trusted peer support in discussing personal and school problems. All students in all classrooms learn more effective ways to communicate and resolve problems using the MBC language. Teachers appreciate having posters for their rooms and facilitators to help them practice the more responsive MBC language during classroom meetings about academic and social problems their students face. Evaluations from parents bring in welcome feedback that MBC steps are used by their children to interrupt impulsive acting out and resolve family conflicts more peaceably.

Special educators and guidance counselors combine their skills, resources and time to provide a more comprehensive approach to meeting individual student needs and creating more respectful classroom societies. Classroom teachers and administrators really appreciate the progress they see with this kind of supportive programming.

Making Better Choices

"BREAKING GROUND"
Stephen Lynch,
Judith Brennan
DI-Stonington Elem.

To make a choice that WORKS FOR ME;

To make a choice that does NOT get me into trouble;

To make a better choice so I DON'T lose my friend,
I can:

STOP

Feelings

1. Note my number:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Am I wound up? If I'm here →, then:

2. Take a few deep breaths.
3. Relax.
4. Tell myself, "I can decide what I do about this."

PLAN

Decisions

Plan what would work better for me
than fighting, name-calling or giving up?

What do I want? How can I say it?
Who could help? What will I do first?

DO

Behaviors

Try my plan.

CHECK it out ✓

Consequences

How did my plan work? Did my number
come down?

Do I need to try a different plan?

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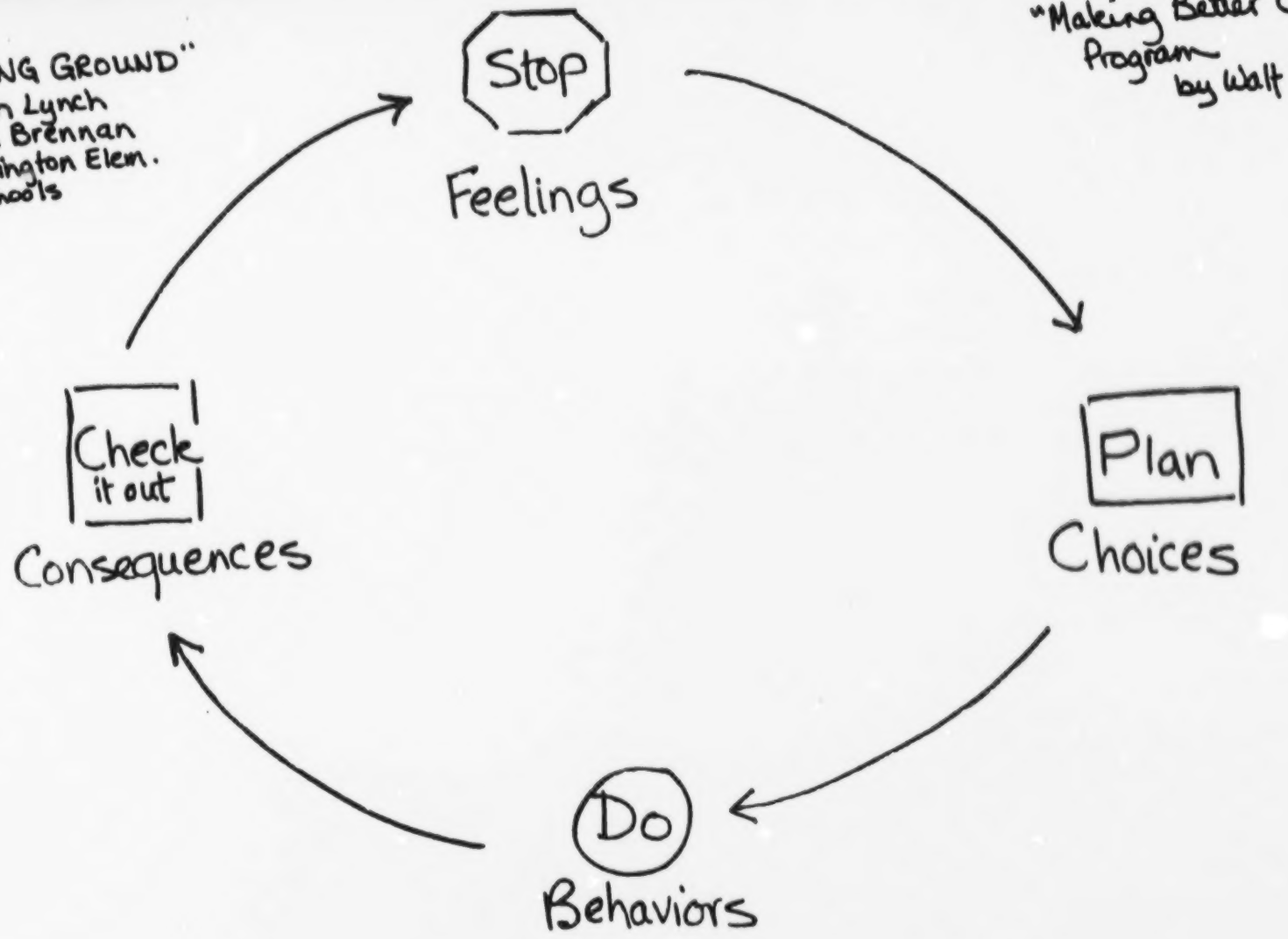
from
"Making Better Choices"
by Walt Harris, 1987, Orono, ME

"BREAKING GROUND"
Stephen Lynch
Judith Brennan
DI-Stonington Elem. Schools

"Making Better Choices" Program by Walt Harris



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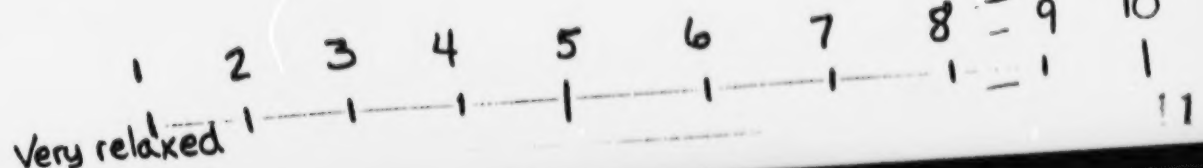

Cognitive Planning Lessons 1-8		Social Skills Lessons 9-27
(Cognitive planning emphasized)		(Cognitive planning and social skills; dual emphasis)

Cognitive Planning Lessons

1. Introducing the MBC program: Behavior as a choice
2. Introducing the MBC cognitive planning sequence
3. STOP: Recognizing tension and frustrations
4. Relaxation as a response to tension and frustration
5. Planning positive behaviors
6. "DO": Using plans
7. Using PLANS for behaviors
8. CHECKing: Learning from mistakes

Social Skills Lessons

9. Beginning a conversation
10. Contributing to a conversation
11. Interrupting a conversation
12. Asking for directions
13. Giving directions
14. Accepting a compliment
15. Giving a compliment
16. Responding cooperatively to requests
17. Saying "No" to peer pressure
18. Coping with teasing
19. Coping with embarrassment
20. Recognizing Apologies
21. Making an Apology
22. Recognizing poor temper control
23. Controlling your temper
24. Complaining effectively
25. Compromising
26. Handling blame
27. Responding to unfair blame

Figure 2
Structure of the MBC Program

Walt Harris, Univ. Maine